

*L. J. Sysko*

**Paula**

*After Paula Modersohn-Becker "Self-Portrait, Age 30, 6<sup>th</sup> Wedding Day," 1906.*

With martial hand she secures  
her breasts for battle  
— everyone knows they store ammunition—

holds the fusillade back  
surveys the field alone  
Blue dragonflies dance

between bodies  
in an apricot grove  
Cutlery tinkers from brothels

busy behind the lines  
Here's lull enough  
to water her horse

She paces forward despite  
the pelvic floor ache  
counts back to tasks

—razing an orchard  
planting it again within  
hearing its slow roots

winnow down  
meeting maize  
in the lower valley—

Craters pock  
miles across  
like nursery wallpaper

flocked and patterned  
Picking their way  
horse and rider

canter across a future piebald  
and short  
The period between wars

always belongs to mothers